

Connecticut Preservation Action

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Testimony for the Planning & Development Committee public hearing
on February 20, 2013

Rep. Rojas, Senator Cassano, and members of the Committee:

**In Support of Raised Bill No. 817, AA Establishing a Property Tax Program to
Encourage the Preservation of Historic Barns And**

In Opposition of Proposed Bill 831, AAC Fees to Establish Historic Districts

My name is Anita Mielert, and I am a former First Selectman in Simsbury and a long-time volunteer for historic preservation in our state. I am here today officially representing Connecticut Preservation Action, a non-profit which advocates for historic preservation in the state legislature and in Congress. We represent individuals and other organizations, such as the CT Trust for Historic Preservation, CT Main Street Center, Hartford Preservation Alliance, New Haven Preservation Trust, and New Canaan Preservation Alliance.

1. CPA is delighted to support a proposal to help preserve historic barns in our state. This measure fits as a logical accompaniment to our open space and farmland preservation policies. What sense does it make to save landscapes without the essential infrastructure that made them—the historic farmhouse, the barns, stone walls, and gardens. What context is lost when the barn is bulldozed away from an 18th century farmhouse? How does one explain tobacco farming in the Connecticut valley when there are no sheds to anchor the fields? The barn is a vernacular icon of our New England life. While most of us take for granted a picturesque scene from Connecticut farmlife, essential ingredients in that scene are in grave danger from slow decline.

I grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin and spent my childhood around barns, chicken coops, pighouses, granaries--what are now sometimes referred to as "ancillary structures." But before we completely succumb to that corporate-speak, let's take a closer look at the importance and beauty of those buildings. The Connecticut Trust's study has done so and has come up with a completely voluntary way for municipalities to support this key feature of their historic landscapes.

My mother once pointed out to me, "The animals are gone from that farm; now the barn will eventually fall down." Of course the animals did not maintain the barn, but the economy based on those animals did. Creating an incentive for adaptive re-use in our contemporary economy will help us achieve a future which includes sustainability, local food supply, creative small business, and smart growth. Supporting this measure will help protect agricultural economies, boost tourism, and attract investment.

2. Regarding Fees to establish Historic Districts:

Instead of shifting the responsibility for the payment of fees, why not take a look at the reason for the fees in the first place? The largest ticket item required in the process is the placing of a legal ad in a newspaper; if the legislature could replace that requirement with something less onerous, no one would have to suffer the cost.

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